

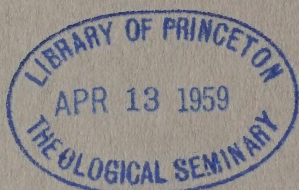
F.W. Creighton

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The Church in Mexico

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*The*  
*Church Historical Society*

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PUBLICATION No. V

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THE CHURCH IN MEXICO

By the

RT. REV. FRANK WHITTINGTON CREIGHTON, D. D.

Bishop of Mexico

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PHILADELPHIA

1929

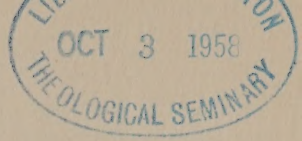












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# THE CHURCH IN MEXICO

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Rt. Rev. Frank Whittington Creighton, D. D.

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*An Address Delivered before the Church Historical Society  
At Its Meeting in Philadelphia, November 14, 1928*

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The Episcopal Church in Mexico occupies a unique position among non-Roman religious bodies in that Republic. In so far as its native work is concerned, it is the continuation of an Evangelical Catholic movement started during Juarez' first tenure of office, and before the period of Maximilian.

The Constitution of 1857 aimed to break the power of the then dominant Church and to clear the way for religious liberty. When the Evangelical movement began, it had the hearty sympathy and in some measure the active support of the Government. The whole idea of a State religion was for ever destroyed, and the way was made clear for a new Evangelical-Catholic Church. The movement practically died out during the period of the Empire, but revived to some extent when Benito Juarez once again seized the reins of authority. Two large Churches in Mexico City, San José de Gracia and San Francisco were turned over to the Evangelicals for their use. The records show that the movement was a popular one. The Roman authorities, alarmed at its size, appointed one of their outstanding priests, Manuel Aguas to study the movement and to oppose it. Manuel Aguas however, as the result of his studies and contacts, himself became a convert, an ardent supporter and finally its outstanding leader. Great throngs of people were attending the services. Records of the period show that when Manuel Aguas preached in San José de Gracia, the Church

was filled to capacity and throngs blocked the streets outside hoping to gain entrance.

No such movement however could hope to be permanent and continue along Catholic lines without the Episcopate. It lacked organization and cohesion and contact with the Universal Church. Hence a Convention was held at which Manuel Aguas was elected first Bishop of "La Iglesia de Jesus en México," and a petition to the American Church was formulated, asking for the Episcopate. Unfortunately for the future of the movement, Manuel Aguas died suddenly in 1872, before anything could be accomplished.

Meanwhile the attention of the leaders of the little Church, as it now considered itself, was attracted to the Rev. Henry Chauncey Riley, an American priest, reared in Chili and thoroughly conversant with the Spanish language and the Latin American point of view. The Rev. Mr. Riley was invited to Mexico City and by his great gift of eloquence and extreme generosity—he was reputed to have been a very wealthy man—commended himself to the Mexican Clergy and people. In 1874 a memorial was presented to the House of Bishops of the American Church asking for his consecration as Bishop of an autonomous Church in Mexico. Meanwhile conflicting rumours as to the size and permanence of the organization were reaching friends of Mexico in the United States and it was hard for the House of Bishops to decide whether there really was a Church or if it merely existed in the minds of those who wanted it. Moreover the liturgy being used was regarded as most unsatisfactory by many who studied it.

In order to become conversant with the facts, Bishop Lee of Delaware was sent to Mexico under the auspices of a commission appointed by the House of Bishops to study the whole situation. He seems to have been carried away by Mexican hospitality and powers of presentation; for, on his own initiative, he proceeded to confirm over one hundred candidates, and to ordain five Deacons and two Priests. Upon his return to the United States after so ardent



a contact, the American Church was practically committed to responsibility for the anomolous Church in Mexico.

For five years the authorities of the Church at home wrestled with the problem, and then decided to consecrate Bishop Riley. Friends of the movement in the States and the ordained Priests in Mexico felt that with his consecration in 1879, they were embarked upon a stable and assured career. Unfortunately, however, by the peculiar action of Bishop Riley their hopes were dashed. After his consecration, instead of returning to Mexico to take up his work, he started on a tour of the world which lasted for two years. When he finally returned to Mexico he found the Church in a deplorable condition. Moreover, lacking administrative powers and making innumerable errors of judgment, the movement under his leadership almost passed out of existence. The great Church of San Francisco was lost, and San José de Gracia was only saved by the indefatigable efforts of Mrs. Josephine Hooker, who was then beginning her work in Mexico City. After five years, of what Doctor McConnell calls "inconsequential" work, Bishop Riley resigned his jurisdiction and the care of the Church in Mexico passed into the hands of the Presiding Bishop.

During all this time practically the entire support for the Mexican Church came from friends in the States. After Bishop Riley's resignation, conditions were so bad that it seemed almost impossible to save it. Members fell away and many of the Clergy returned to secular work. During many years following, and while the Church was in charge of the Presiding Bishop, details of administration and oversight were in the hands of resident commissioners, the last two of whom, the Rev. William B. Gordon and the Rev. Henry Forrester, were able to bring order out of chaos, and put the movement somewhat in line with Church traditions, discipline and customs. At the end of Mr. Forrester's administration, La Iglesia de Jesus felt itself strong enough to once again apply to the American Church for Episcopal orders. At a Convention of the Clergy and Laity, the Rev.

Mr. Forrester was elected Bishop of the Valley of Mexico and all friends of the movement looked forward with hope to its strengthening under his wise administration, and a material increase in members and in support. Unfortunately however, Mr. Forrester died shortly after his election, and it seemed once again as if the whole movement would collapse.

Meanwhile oil had been discovered in Mexico, mines had been taken over by English and American companies. Railroads were building and huge numbers of Americans and Britishers were flocking into the Republic. The needs of the English speaking people for Church Services were in themselves a challenge to the American Church; and a challenge which was accepted. In 1904 the Rev. Henry Damorel Aves was consecrated first Missionary Bishop of Mexico. Shortly after his arrival in the Republic the autonomous native Church of its own volition asked to be received under his jurisdiction. A concordat was drawn up, agreeable to both the Mexican and American Churches, and Bishop Aves became not only Bishop of the English speaking people, but of La Iglesia de Jesus which now became an integral part of the American Church. During Bishop Aves' Episcopate, the number of communicants and Churches increased and at one time he reported seventy-two Churches and Missions in the Republic under his jurisdiction. Then came the Revolution with its attendant difficulties for us. Our entire work in Oaxaca and the Isthmus of Tehuantepec was lost; Missions were closed everywhere, Congregations scattered and Church buildings destroyed.

At the close of the Revolution a Convention was held in Queretaro in 1917 at which a new Constitution for Mexico was adopted, embodying many of the features of the Constitution of 1857 and the Laws of Reform as promulgated by Benito Juarez. No effort was made, however, to pass regulatory or enforcement acts. Many people in the Republic felt that the provisions of the Constitution were applicable immediately upon its enactment; others, that they



were intended merely as a warning. The attendant uncertainty made work difficult and discouraging for Bishop and Clergy. Bishop Aves ended his long Episcopate in 1923. At the meeting of the House of Bishops in Dallas that year, when his resignation was accepted, his Episcopate was accurately referred to as one of, "devoted and arduous labour through a period fraught with difficulties, problems and dangers." At the same meeting of the House of Bishops a report of the Committee of Foreign Missions was adopted, recommending that the election of a Bishop for Mexico be postponed until the next meeting of the House of Bishops. During the debates on these resolutions, Bishop Kinsolving made his now famous statement that he did not approve of, "bootlegging religion into Mexico."

No action on a Bishop for Mexico was taken at the meeting of the House of Bishops in New York in 1924, and it was not until General Convention in 1925 in New Orleans that favourable action was taken, and the present incumbent and speaker elected Second Missionary Bishop of Mexico.

Shortly after my arrival in Mexico, President Calles on July 2nd 1926 issued a pronouncement to the Nation, anticipating the provisions of the Constitution of 1917 having to do with religion. Rather than face the implication of action by the next Congress, the Roman Church on August 1st, 1926 withdrew from the Republic, practically placing it under an interdict, and services of any kind conducted by priests were forbidden. Churches were allowed to remain open but such Services as were held were conducted by lay people. An attempt at boycott by members of the Roman Church, first of luxuries and then of necessities, which was an effort to paralyze the business of the country and arouse public opinion against the Government, failed. The Government calmly proceeded with its policy of making applicable and enforcing the provisions of the Constitution of 1917.

Meanwhile it seemed as if the English speaking work

would be ended by the impending action of Congress; inasmuch as article 130 of the Constitution distinctly says: "It is necessary to be a Mexican by birth in order to be a minister of any religious creed in Mexico." The Bill regulating and enforcing the religious provisions in the Constitution was passed by Congress at the end of December 1926 and published in the *Diario Oficial* of January 18th, 1927. The general religious provisions of the Constitution now embodied in law are: "That the law recognizes no corporate existence in the religious associations known as Churches; all Church property pertains to the Nation; state legislature may determine the maximum number of ministers of religious creeds, according to the needs of each locality; ministers of religious creeds may not criticize the laws of the country or authorities of Government in general; they have no vote and will not be eligible to office; they are legally disqualified to inherit by will from ministers of the same sect or from any other person to whom they are not related by blood within the fourth degree. It is necessary to be a Mexican by birth in order to be a minister in Mexico, and the infraction of any of the preceding provisions will never be the subject of a trial by jury"

Much to the surprise and delight of English speaking Clergymen in Mexico, when the law was promulgated, appended to it was a series of transitory articles, the first one of which gives foreign Clergymen, duly registered, permission to officiate for Congregations of their own nationals for a period of six years, during which time they must educate their successors who are to be Mexicans by birth. This provision made it possible for me and the English speaking Clergy to remain in the Republic and carry on our work. We are all registered at the request of English speaking Congregations, as our Mexican Clergy are registered for their respective Churches. Obviously, however, such an arrangement is not entirely satisfactory as I may not confirm native candidates in their own Churches, nor am I able to conduct any Service or preach in a native Church. We



have tried to make the best of this anomolous situation by holding native Confirmations in Christ Church Cathedral. I have also held Ordination Services in the Cathedral at various times.

One of the most irritating provisions to the law is the one which requires us to possess temples which must be registered as Government property before we can undertake new work. The old plan of beginning with a small group in a private house is utterly impossible and, as it would be both a costly and an uncertain experiment to either build a Church or buy a property before a Congregation is gathered, we are now practically limited to such work as is already under way and the revival of work in centres where we own property and where work was necessarily discontinued during the Revolution.

Our work is among three groups of nationals, the members of the Church of England, the American Episcopalians and the Mexicans. It falls naturally into three departments: Educational, Social Service and Evangelistic.

We have five schools in the Republic. By far the largest and most important is Colegio Hooker, founded by Mrs. Josephine Hooker for less privileged Mexican girls. Mrs. Hooker, who came to Mexico City presumably for a visit, remained here devoting her life and fortune to this work. Hooker School to-day is one of the outstanding schools in Mexico with over three hundred pupils and a large American and Mexican teaching staff. Girls come to us from all parts of the Republic and it is our effort to send them back to their cities and villages as leaven in the society of which they are a part. The School is in an overcrowded condition but we hope soon to erect new buildings and a new infirmary, the former with funds provided by the Children's Birthday Thank Offering of the triennial 1925 to 1928. Unfortunately, in August of 1926 it was necessary for us to dismantle the Chapel in Hooker School and discontinue religious instruction. We are, however, making an effort to

carry out the real purpose of the School by conveying our pupils to the Church of San José de Gracia every Sunday morning in buses. We have also secured permission from the Departments of Education and Gobernacion to establish a School of Ethics outside of School hours and of the regular curriculum. Hooker School is under Government inspection, we follow the Government curriculum and have received the warm praise of the representatives of the Department of Education.

We have two large Social Service centres: one in Mexico City and one in the State of Hidalgo. This latter is in charge of Mrs. Sara Q. de Salinas, wife of Pbro. Samuel Salinas. Mrs. Salinas has studied English in order to make herself conversant with the contents of medical and hygiene books, so that she may minister efficiently to her people. Last year she treated over one thousand cases, including malignant diseases, gun-shot wounds as well as assisting at child birth. Her patients are brought to her from points far distant and she and her work are a veritable benediction to the people of the sparsely settled and mountainous region in which she lives.

Our evangelistic work among Mexicans, is carried on in thirty-two centres in various parts of the Republic. The vast majority of our Mexican members are pure Indians. Many of our missions are in inaccessible mountain regions far from the railroad and are only reached by difficult and tiring journeys on horse or "burro" back. Our own members, like all the Indian population of Mexico, have been thoroughly roused by the efforts of the present Government. They are passing through a difficult period during which many ancient habits and customs are in abeyance, but they are displaying potential qualities and characteristics which will undoubtedly make for their happiness and advance in the future. There is a keen appreciation of the rural school which is being made increasingly available to them. In many of these Schools there is a combination of elementary and agricultural training which will enable a future gen-



eration to make more intelligent use of the soil donated to them under the agrarian plan.

Mexico at the present time is engaged in a social experiment of profound significance. Whether the people are ready for so radical an advance as is implied in the Social programme, is debatable, but even though adjustments may be necessary there is a new outlook on life and a new desire for education and progress. It is our hope and prayer that the Church may make an important contribution to whatever may be Mexico's future, and that God will bless the efforts we are putting forth for the advance of His Kingdom among our brethren in the neighboring Republic.







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# THE CHURCH HISTORICAL SOCIETY

217 South Twentieth Street

PHILADELPHIA

Organized May 17, 1910

Incorporated June 10, 1913

For the preservation and publication of historical documents connected with the Church, the investigation of its history, and the development of interest in all relevant historical research.

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